

[Jazz Music (Chicago)]

W3665

Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

CHICAGO

No. Words 1880

[Jun?] 14

June 14 1939

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Sam Ross

ADDRESS 713 Rush Street

DATE May 10, 1939

SUBJECT Jazz music (Chicago)

1. Date and time of interview -

May 3rd, 1.00 A. M. - May 4th, afternoon

2. Place of interview -

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3 Deuces and California Hotel (Washington & Mozart)

3. Name and address of informant -

George Barnes, California Hotel

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. -

None

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you -

None

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

The 3 Deuces is a famous night spot, especially for lovers of jazz music. In the past, during the prohibition era it was one of the few spots where musicians would come after working hours to get into jam sessions. In those days men like Bix Beiderbecke, Eddie Condon, Bud Freeman, Frank Teschmaker, sometimes Benny Goodman, Dave Tough, would come down and sit together and play the music they 'felt'. Now it is a legitimate spot in which to come. Upstairs is a bar where they have Negro performers including Lonnie Johnson on guitar, Lil Armstrong on piano, and Baby Dodds on drums. Downstairs is the Off Beat Room where there are usually two orchestras and where Georgie Barnes is a featured guitarist. Barnes' room is a typical hotel room. He has a table beside his bed which has a radio and a victrola attachment, beneath his bed are a stack of records. All he has to do is reach over and under to play the music he likes to hear and which influences him.

FORM B Personal History of Informant

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

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FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

No. Words

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Sam Ross

ADDRESS 713 Rush Street

DATE May 10, 1939

SUBJECT Jazz music (Chicago)

NAME OF INFORMANT George Barnes

1. Ancestry -

One eighth French; rest English. American before Civil War.

2. Place and date of birth-

Chicago Heights, July 17, 1921

3. Family -

4. Places lived in, with dates -

5. Education, with dates -

2 years high school - 16 -'37

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6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

10. Other Points gained in interview

FORM D Extra Comment

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Sam Ross

ADDRESS 713 Rush Street

DATE May 10, 1939

SUBJECT Jazz music (Chicago)

NAME OF INFORMANT George Barnes

The informant is one of the featured performers at the 3 Deuces. He is a small fellow who walks around the place awkwardly an though his sleeves were too long on him, and he plays with a dead pan face. He is only 17 years old and he is already a sensation, with such men as Tommy Dorsey and Jimmy MacPartland recognizing him as great. I have

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heard him at the club and he wows the audience every time, so that he is forced to play at least three-four encores nearly every time. He just gets out on the floor and sits on a chair and plays, improvising on various jazz tunes. Until he feels that he has exploited the thing, then he walks back onto the orchestra stand and takes his place very unassumingly, bows slightly and awkwardly as though he would wish that there wouldn't be as much applause as there is and that he wouldn't have to play again. But in his apartment he played me some records to show me how he would like to play. His face lights up and you can feel a good trumpet work through him and his comments are very illuminating. He played some Beiderbecke records and wished to hell those cymbals would be thrown out of the orchestra, for they cluttered up the beauty of Beiderbecke's tone. There was one spot in the recording of Singing The Blues where Beiderbecke 2 takes a terrific break, and right after that Beiderbecke goes into a savage attack. Barnes' face sparked up. "Listen to that break. You can just feel how big a bang he got of it the way he attacks the next phrase." At the end when Beiderbecke goes into a very restrained high phrase, Barnes said, "That's beautiful, isn't it? That's beautiful." And he would interrupt the record spin and play the sections over the over again. He played a trumpet section by Oliver Armstrong, and he said, "That's the feel I'd like to get out of my guitar," while listening to some delicate, inspired phrases, not loud and slurry and sensational, like Louis Armstrong, but packed with feeling in the note arrangement and the restraint.

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

No. Words 1880

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NAME OF WORKER Sam Ross

ADDRESS 713 Rush Street

DATE May 10, 1939

SUBJECT

NAME OF INFORMANT George Barnes

When I was five years old I first started to play an instrument. It was a piano. My brother played the piano. My father played a guitar. I used to pick out tunes like Dixie and Yankee Doodle. [I played that while I was in shcool]. When I was ten my dad lost everything, [his home and all that], and we had to move. After that we didn't have a piano. So I got a German accordion about two years later and then I got a banjo uke and after that a guitar which I've been playing up until now. I never took any formal lessons. [Those lessons I did get were kind of informal, from the guys I used play with, because as far as I know there isn't any method out for playing solo guitar].

I played in my first orchestra a year and a half ago. It was an eight piece combination called the Rhythm-Aires. I did all the arranging for the band. It was freaky, doubling orchestration I did because most of the guys would switch from one instrument to another. We did mostly jobbing dates around Chicago Heights. The guys worked during the day and they played around at night to make some extra cash and because they liked to play. From there I went to work in another band in a night club. The m.c. at the Club Casanova heard us one night and he asked me to get a couple guys together to play there. We had a four piece outfit, trumpet, piano, drums, and guitar. I worked there twelve weeks. I remember that 2 job better than anything. It was the first time for everything for me. We played three shows a night and I had to change all my orchestrations to the tenor scale. [My brother taught me everything I know on harmoney and a little bit about counterpoint. I don't know enough about counterpoint though and I'm going to study it some day soon. My

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brother had a fine musical training. But in jazz it's very easy to feel counterpoint. You feel your way into it.

Then I jobbed with Jimmy Reynolds, a ten piece combination. And in] the summer we went to Cedar Lake to work in a taxi dance hall. That was the hardest job I ever worked. There was only one intermission a night of four minutes and then we'd split the band up. The boys in the band'd call me junior but I don't mind being kidded. That job was so hard we always played our library from one end to the other. And that place was crowded until the doors closed. After the job we could hardly stand up. Even if we wanted to we couldn't drink because we didn't have time. But I don't drink anyhow, not even now, and most of the other guys didn't care for it because they had to be all there to perform, and you can't drink and get places too. I used to play off the second trumpet there. We used stock arrangements aside from mine, and I played all trumpet solos on my guitar. There were no real swing musicians in that band then. I liked swing. I always liked it even when I didn't know what it was. I felt it like this. I knew Guy Lombardo was bad. But I didn't 3 know what swing really was until I heard Bix Beiderbecke on records. He has been my big influence. I don't think anybody playing today has not been influenced by Bix. I understand he was a great guy, everybody who ever worked with him thought he was great. Even though I don't approve of a lot of things he done, like smoking weed and doing goofy things, he was still great. Well, listening to Bix and others on records were my only influences. You know I never heard any guitar solos until a year ago. I liked to hear Tommy Dorsey and Benny Goodman. I don't know how I missed up on guitar solos I enjoy them so much now. We have some records of Segovia, you know, the classical guitar player. He's great. Anyhow guys like Goodman and Dorsey and Coleman Hawkins never change. They were good when I first heard them and they are just as good now. Their kind of music sort of lasts. Funny I never benefited by Armstrong and Hodges. They play different music. It's not that mine has more notes in the improvisation, but Armstrong's attack and expression is a different thing. It's jagged when it comes to delicacy and terrific when it comes to feeling. I think the trouble is he isn't satisfied to play good music. You feel he tries to make great

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music. Therefore he's not always good. Teddy Wilson plays a delicate piano and when he does play gut bucket it's a different kind. And when Wilson plays 'lightly and politely' as Armstrong would call it he is tops. Anyhow all the stuff I got that amounts to anything I got from those records.

Now I've been at the Deuces four months. I went on the road for a hillbilly outfit but I didn't play hillbilly music. I was used to fill in with other stuff. 4 The best jam sessions are in Chicago Heights. There everybody played and liked to play but they didn't show off. [I've been around plenty of sessions in Chicago but they are nothing like those in Chicago Heights. I didn't like the Chicago sessions. In Chicago Heights they really played]. There was a trumpet there who inspired us all but now he is definitely commercial in a sweet band. Boy, we used to groove real holes out there. We'd start about 2:30 Sunday afternoon at one joint and at 5:30 everybody'd go to a hideout joint in order to avoid union complications and play indefinitely. The trouble with the sessions in Chicago the musicians like to show off, they want to show the others what they got, and they take as many choruses they can get away with, and they sort of hog the show, and then they are not making music and feeling it but they are just being clever [and I just can't get in the groove with them]. Hell, up in Chicago Heights we'd sit down and play blues for an hour and a half and we'd have to stop from mental and physical exhaustion although the ideas we'd be getting are absolutely inexhaustible. The more you get yourself worked up you know you're in a groove. You can walk in on a session and even if they're on the eight or ninth chorus, if they are right and in the groove you can tell immediately, even when you walk in cold—you can tell it from the flexibility of tone from the instruments how long they've been playing and how long they've been in the groove. Now, at the Deuces, with my quartet I get off about three grooves a night, but I couldn't get it before with the orchestra behind me. When you're in a groove you are 5 lost in what you're doing. You can talk to somebody, you can be distracted but the groove stays and you pick it up right away. You have to relax and let it get you. [To play good music you have to relax and when you are it gets you].

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Jazz isn't like classical music where you get a chance to describe things. Most swing musicians aren't well educated and they don't do anything but play their instruments and sleep late in the day, and that's bad. I'm going to get away from that and broaden myself and get a background. I think it'll help my music. The images we get are very disconnected, not like in classical music, it's more like a dream. For instance just before you came [up?] I dreamed that Jimmy MacPartland was leading our orchestra. And you know what a fine trumpet player he is. Now if I hadn't mentioned it to you and hadn't talked about it tonight he may have had a certain influence on my notes, the way I'd get them out. You see, our images are really definite. Now Raymond Scott uses open description in his music. You take Stormy Night Aboard An Ocean Liner. You can see and feel that in his music. For instance I wrote a piece recently called Howard Street Express. You know how that express [?] ride can drive a guy nutty and I tried to get it, the thoughts, the sounds, the feelings of that ride. [Now that's definite and I can describe the meaning of every note, but in jazz, when in the groove it is all that experience of the ride, say, and more, but you can't put your fingers on it exactly]. Here's how I happened to write that piece. That night I took that ride I had a fight with my girl earlier because I didn't like her to smoke cigarettes, which I guess was a pretty foolish thing. I was in a terrific groove. I couldn't eat and I couldn't sleep and I rode that L [El?] all night long. About a month later we made up but that ride and its feeling was still on my mind and I thought I'd better get it off and write the song. [Writing it got it off my mind [That is the only thing I ever play where I never change a note. Usually there are certain passages I improvise when I play even though it is arranged and rehearsed, which might be variations of those thoughts and others, but that Howard Street Express I play the same way all the time]. [I think American jazz is a part of American folk music. The classical music is a thing of the past; it is European and outdone and a lot of our composers are copyists of those old time classical scores. I am prejudiced I guess because I am American and I think American things are better than European. And in the long run I think it'll develop (jazz) into a real music, a finished product, different than the classical stuff and just as great if not greater. Some people say

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that American music is low because it was originated by Negroes but that's not so. It hasn't developed yet but it will].

I wrote another tune called Scatter Brain Rag. It's a goofy title. It closely resembles a march. It sort of expresses my first time at the Deuces. I played with Jimmy (MacPartland) for the first time and with guys who really played Dixieland music which was always tops with me. I had never played with guys who knew Dixieland music before. And I 7 liked Jimmy a lot, the way he could play that trumpet. Well, we played three-four Dixieland tunes that sounded like marches. That set me in a groove and I got to thinking how close Dixieland music resemble marches and how nice marches sounded even though I never liked them before but they can sound real nice. I got to thinking about the different licks and I put it together about three-four months ago when one night we didn't have anything special to rehearse and I wrote the thing almost exactly like a march, you know, with a prelude, a first part, then the trio coming in, and then back to the refrain and I had five measures to improvise. Benny Goodman's manager liked it when he heard it.

I like evolutionistic arrangements like Ellington's. They go like this. (Referring to Scatter Brain Rag). I start out on guitar with a simple two measure phrase, which is the foundation idea. The bass fiddle comes in and plays chord structures with a little embellishment, then the guitar on the third phrase and the sax on the fourth with counterpoint and the fifth time you start the tune and at the end of the fifth solo the counterpoint is used and then the melody comes off that, which doesn't come in until the complete background is built up. And the tune ends the way it begins, and at the end we got a bangout for two measures with everybody in.